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# INTRODUCTION

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EVERYDAY

**T**HE RANGE OF activities which has been named as 'Community and Youth Work', emerged and has continued to evolve within the peculiarly local conditions created by industrial and global capitalism. In nineteenth century Britain, and subsequently whenever and wherever new methods of production have overturned family-based economies, so traditional social institutions designed to reproduce the previous conditions of existence, have been weakened or destroyed. Fixed social roles, belief systems and hierarchies of power have been disrupted across the world as the free market has spread its 'hidden hand' throughout the last two centuries. The consequences have been profound as people have struggled to adapt to processes of change and development.

The historical 'grand narratives' of the creation of nations and empires, of advances in science and technology, of the universalisation of humanistic values, culture and knowledge and the creation of wealth on an unimagined scale are shot through with human suffering and struggle, the scale of which is immense. Everything from the catastrophes of war, famine, and the degradation of the environment, to the simple unending misery of exploitation, squalor, poverty, homelessness and powerlessness have been part of the landscape of everyday life for many people caught up in the changes. It is in this landscape that community and youth work is located. Here is a history of intervention, organisation and action within daily struggle. That history includes a wide range of intentions and purposes. At its best, motivated by the ideals of justice, democracy, and equality it has been a catalyst for creative, cooperative activity amongst ordinary people. At its worst, motivated by fear and insecurity, it has been an unquestioning servant of the forces of repression and control. Since it began, community and youth work has been constrained to negotiate the tension between domestication and liberation. That tension is played out in the minutiae of decision-making on the ground, as much as within the policy formulations of funding agencies and umbrella organisations. To understand the history, it is, therefore, as important to consider the small moments, the individuals and local groups, as it is to be aware of the wider organisational or political narrative.

The highest ideals of community and youth work have always suggested the possibility that, however enormous the odds against it, ordinary people are capable of combining

and organising, of adapting and creating institutions which not only address individual and social problems, but also contain within them the possibility and the means of constructing a better world. At its most constructive, community and youth work contains both a responsiveness to the local and an implicit optimism that the values which it represents transcend the local. Its ideals of justice and democracy and its belief in an equality between people which acknowledges the significance of difference, contain a universalism which is ever-present in even the most mundane intervention. However, the fact that most community and youth work interventions are practical, small scale, geographically specific and often transient, has meant that they have made little impression on the pages of history books. There are organisations whose success has been international and sustained such as the Scouts, Barnardo's and the YMCA, but the stories of these organisations are popularly known only in their own terms, or as expressions of the genius of their founders. Even when such organisations are included as relevant to the general sweep of social history, they are rarely analysed in the context of the complex and interconnected story of the development of community and youth work. Even less are they offered as histories which represented the lives of the ordinary people who have participated in them.

Community and youth work is at its heart the story of voluntary association and affiliation. It is admittedly a flawed and circumscribed response to the circumstances it addresses, sometimes ideologically biased and often imbued with the political and religious beliefs of its practitioners (Davies, 2001). Frequently it is driven off course by inappropriate decisions relating to funding which are at odds with local desires (Jeffs and Smith, 1999). Yet to survive it must always be attuned to at least some aspects of the needs and interests of those whom it seeks to influence or serve. Without such responsiveness all that would remain would be the bureaucratic, managerial and controlling elements of organisation. When the social intervention fails to engage local people, it ceases to be community and youth work, however it names itself, and becomes something else. For it is intrinsic to community and youth work activity that it responds appropriately to the realities of time and place. People will not voluntarily participate in organisations, no matter how well resourced, which do not meet their needs or expectations. They will not associate, least of all become friends with, strangers who do not show sensitivity, consideration and respect for their cultures and the circumstances of their lives. Thus to some extent, the history of community and youth work, always includes a part of the history of the lives of the people whom it has sought to serve.

In the main, these are people who as individuals have been silenced in traditional history, who only make appearances as 'the masses' – undifferentiated, poor and dangerous. They are the people whose collective memories have been disrupted by the movements of populations, whose opportunities to reflect and record the incidences of their lives have been restricted by the contingencies of everyday survival, whose access to the means of the production of history has been virtually non-existent. Yet they are also the people who have endured and weathered the most extreme consequences of industrial and post-industrial capitalism, of imperialism and globalisation. To research and recover the history of community and youth work, to seek to analyse and understand the initiatives of the past is, therefore, not only relevant as a means of

informing contemporary professional practice (Gilchrist, Jeffs and Spence, 2001) but it is also important to the project of reconstructing and understanding the meaning of ordinary lives. It is people living ordinary lives whose social behaviour, in often insecure and discouraging circumstances, can demonstrate most forcefully the possibilities for real human progress and it is in the service of developing this potential that the best community and youth work has been mobilised.

## **THE MEANING OF COMMUNITY AND YOUTH**

Community and youth work emerged as a voluntary and amateur response to the negative aspects of social change and global expansion within Britain and its empire, to become a fashionable and respectable occupation during the nineteenth century. The motivations of those involved were many and various, as selfish as they were selfless, but in all cases, they were a response to the insecurities, inequalities and instability created by new conditions of social existence. It is symptomatic of the time and place that it was mostly concentrated within the burgeoning industrial cities and towns created by the centralisation and concentration of the processes of manufacture, exchange and financial management. However, specific organisations and activities also emerged to deal with changing conditions within rural life, and there is, running through community and youth work, a complex and uneven relationship between the urban and the rural.

The most profound of the changes which industrialisation brings is a shift in the balance between the rural and the urban, characterised by population movement and population growth. Nineteenth century Britain is the classic case of this process. For instance, between 1801 and 1901, the population of Birmingham grew from 71,000 to 760,00, that of Cardiff from 2,000 to 164,000, of Glasgow 77,000 to 762,000. These particular figures represent a complete reversal of the rural/urban population. Whereas at the start of the nineteenth century, 30 per cent of the population could be characterised as 'urban', by the end this had risen to 77 per cent (More, 1997, 92). There was a rise of nearly 27 per cent in the population of England and Wales in the years between 1851 and 1871. Whilst this figure is dramatic enough in itself, what it hides is the fact that London's total population increased by about 45 per cent, Leeds by 50 per cent and Sheffield by 78 per cent. Meanwhile, in the industrial areas of Durham and Glamorgan, the rise was 70 per cent, whilst the population of Norfolk decreased and Wiltshire, Somerset and Cornwall retained a steady state (Cole and Postgate, 1968, 347). Rural village life and culture begins a steady and continuing decline as industrial economies accelerate and as people seek opportunities elsewhere (Thompson, 1948; 1976).

The stories of the migrations effected by capitalist growth and expansion are stories of violence, conflict and want on both a local and global scale. Even when people move 'freely', they often do so under conditions which are informed primarily by cycles of demand and supply in the labour market. Sometimes people move as individuals, but more frequently they do so in groups creating 'communities of identity' in new localities, where they attempt to live according to previously known values and cultures within unfathomable conditions of existence (Gartner, 1960; MacGill, 1986; Wilson, 1980). However, unfamiliar experiences and circumstances demand creative as well



as traditional responses if life is to become more than mere survival. Thus whilst it engenders a deep conservatism and a strengthening of the bonds of community identification, migration also involves an inevitable dissolution of those bonds appropriate to different times and places. As new circumstances force the adaptation or rejection of traditional obligations and duties, so those traditions become ossified and idealised. Community identification in this process becomes a site of imagination, a story from the past which informs present reality but which can never be realised (Sante, 2002).

In order to survive in dynamic and often unstable conditions, the young in particular must become alert to the contemporary and be prepared to ride the waves of change. 'Youth' itself becomes problematic and unfathomable as young people attempt to create their own communities forged from the realities of their own worlds – worlds which no longer mirror the dreams of parents. In the context of concentrated population growth in confined spaces, additional difficulties for social order associated with youth are identified as young people attempt to assert their right to inhabit and use local places (Brent, 2001; Scott, 2000; Urwick, 1904). The constant demand of productive processes for new skills, for adaptability to change and for conformity to a bland culture of passivity provoke the development of systems of education and training aimed specifically at the young. Thus youth itself becomes a site of anxiety and conflict. The development of the concept of adolescence and changing notions of 'youth' are symptomatic of the problematising of this life-stage.

The romantic myth of the traditional interdependent and mutually supportive community, always in another place and time, often in some rural arcadia, where the young are effortlessly socialised and trained to inherit the mantles of the ancestors, is itself a construct of the industrial revolution. In it, the idea of 'community' is reified and sanitised and as such it becomes a token of traditional and conservative thinking. It is not surprising in this context that 'community' has been eschewed by the Marxist tradition within social science. However, the longing which it expresses in the ideal of 'community' is real enough. For at a fundamental level, people need each other. They need association in families, groups and organisations. They need to recognise themselves in the other and they need the security of knowing that they are known. The striving for community is at its heart a striving to belong which transcends time and place. Understanding the universality of the desire of people to associate with a sense of community is a crucial aspect of understanding the significance of community and youth work as an activity with global relevance, containing within itself the potential of radical and constructive approaches to social change which far outweigh the conservative elements within it. To some extent, community and youth work has flourished because ordinary people believe in the idea of community. However, at its best, its success and relevance is not to have fed romanticism and nostalgia – though it has been known to do that, not to have pathologised young people as 'adolescents' – though it has been known to do that too, but to bring resources, knowledge, ideas and organisation towards those striving for better ways of co-existing in adverse conditions, striving to find the means towards control over their own lives and in so doing developing a critical and informed understanding of social and political power.

The efforts of workers to engage people in the construction of 'community' in localities, is not only based on a desire to create a fixed entity focused upon the commonality of place, but also about the recognition of common interests which include difference. Fundamentally, this involves dialogue between people and dynamism in the creation of new social institutions. Such a process-orientated understanding of the developmental possibilities inherent in the idea of community must take account of differentiated and complex economic activity, of different pasts and cultures, of different dreams for the future. It must deal with the nostalgia for imagined communities, incorporate that and transcend it. It must recognise the peculiar position inhabited by the young, address that and contextualise it. This process requires grounded theoretical knowledge and reflexivity intrinsic to which is an informed understanding of the histories of groups in communities. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that those workers who are emerging as the most significant in the history of the profession, have been people who have consistently sought to learn as well as to teach. For them, education in its broadest sense has been a cornerstone of their community building.

## **THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF COMMUNITY AND YOUTH WORK**

The general history of community and youth work is the story of the reformation and formation of particular social groups and structures and of the corresponding development of discourses of community. As such, it is an aspect of social history, situated within the field of social sciences. It is also the story of the purposive interventions of individuals and of the construction of organisations designed to respond to oppressive and destructive conditions of existence. As such, it belongs within the professional histories of social work and education. Yet although it makes appearances within these disciplines, it is rarely differentiated and named specifically within them. Like those ordinary lives which it has attempted to serve, the history of community and youth work is largely invisible, its voices silent and unheard. This is not because the work has been unrecorded, nor because community and youth workers have had no access to the means of publicising their stories. It is rather because it does not sit easily within academic thought. Its language, ever mindful of the groups whom it serves, takes as its reference points people engaged in practical action rather than the theoretical excursions which Octavia Hill is said to have dismissed as 'windy talk' (cited in Lewis, 1992). In focusing upon informal education, it has emphasised the oral and the visual above the written. Paying heed to professional responsibilities it has produced the descriptive report rather than the analytical thesis.

For most of its history, community and youth work has been consigned to the margins of intellectual and institutional organisation. In working with people who have little power and in seeking to find the means whereby such people might organise themselves and speak, it has won itself few plaudits. Where its endeavours and successes have been small scale, particular to localities or specific social groups, the records of its achievements have been consigned to the enthusiasms of amateur historians, dismissed by the academy as mere localism. Insofar as the sense of the local, of practice and of dynamic but superficially mundane interventions in everyday life predominate, community and youth work does not easily find a place within the grand narratives and theoreticism

of conventional academic thought. The consequence has been that it has been difficult to establish the distinctiveness of community and youth work as a discipline and a profession, difficult to find a place within which it can develop a coherent theoretical and knowledge framework, to locate its own boundaries and critically assess its own contradictions and tensions.

The survival and continuing development of community and youth work, like any other social activity, cannot be guaranteed. Its future seems less than certain as the conditions for the expression of commitment and enthusiasm in social organisation are increasingly squeezed between a narrowly defined professionalism on the one hand and the incursions of bureaucracy and authoritarian agencies of surveillance and social control into everyday life on the other. However, it is more likely to flourish if it is able to establish its credentials as a discipline. It could be argued that this is a task which has some urgency. The ever greater fragmentation of urban neighbourhoods, the collapse of infrastructure in rural localities, the increasing polarisation between the rich and poor, the healthy and sick of the world and the desperation of those forced to migrate and transgress tightening borders in the search for safety and the means of earning a living, suggest that there is a greater need than ever for those with the motivation to create a better world, to be provided with the resources and political backing to develop the necessary knowledge and skill and the institutional infrastructure which bears some relation to the extent of the task.

Despite the blandishments of concepts such as communitarianism, despite the formal adoption of citizenship education, centralised initiatives which take no heed of the demands of the principle of voluntary affiliation and pay nothing but lip service to the democratic desire of ordinary people for representation, have made little progress towards engendering a dynamic and selfless community consciousness. In its absence, cynical commercial interests exploit romantic and sentimentalised notions of community in the creation of pretend, instant local communities, whose imagined securities are available only to the rich (Bauman, 2001). It is important to the progress of civilised social life that 'community' is named appropriately, that its meanings are inhabited by those for whom a sense of belonging and security are forged out of association, friendship, activism and service, that the hope which it embodies is not degraded in the lust for corporate profit and private gain. The work of retrieving the history of community and youth work is a crucial part of asserting the significance of a discourse of community that is both local and universal and which transcends the romantic and exploitative.

To establish such a discourse is also important as a means of clarifying the distinctiveness of community and youth work from what we have come to know in Britain as 'social work'. Both professions share a common ancestry, are indeed part of the same movement. In its early use, 'social work' was simply a generic term for all that activity concerned with administering to the social (Macdonald, 1913). It included settlement, housing and club work, family visiting, legal advice and all manner of charitable and voluntary initiatives. Community and youth work has no specific name within this. Insofar as contemporary historians have necessarily also adopted a generic term, such as 'social service' or 'social welfare' to identify this activity (Parker, 1988), it remains conceptually undifferentiated. It was only with the formal success



of the methods of the Charity Organisation Society, that therapeutic social work with individuals and families, and with a pathological view of poverty that the meaning of 'social work' became more narrowly defined. In this process, social welfare organisations which did not fit easily within the unsympathetic, scientific approach of the COS, including those such as the YMCA and YWCA which predated it, and most club work, began to fall outside the definitional frame of social work. This was exacerbated by the increasing tendency to reify 'adolescence' in work with young people which began to conceptually separate youth work from both social work and community work. Over the years, the approach to distress and crisis which we now identify as 'social work' has consistently marginalised those elements within itself which seek solutions to local problems in 'community' (Jones, 2002). Such aspects of the original field have been granted only intermittent and limited formal recognition and status within professional social work, and although knowledge and understanding relevant to community and youth work is continuously articulated within social work, this is undervalued by what have become the dominant meanings.

Whilst youth work has been more successful in establishing its distinctiveness from social work than has community work, this has been won at a price. The relationship between community and youth work is continuously threatened by the insistence that young people are distinctive, that they can be defined predominantly by age-related characteristics. The ideas which led Russell and Rigby (1908) to attempt to characterise different 'types' of boy, which informed the development of specific 'youth movements' such as the Scouts, and ultimately gave rise to the statutory Youth Service, are conceptually related to the thinking which has led to the current development of the Connexions Service. Gains for young people have come from these developments, but in the process that work which seeks to respond to young people in terms of their social location, which seeks to connect youth with community, has flourished only intermittently, and lacked a specific name.

Community and youth work is perhaps a hybrid term, but it is one which attempts to combine all that social and informal educational work which involves voluntary affiliation, is responsive to lived conditions of existence and seeks democratic participation and social justice. It is work which, grounded in ideals of friendship and association, consistently attempts to reach those members of society who refuse the embrace of other professionals. Its successful methods contain something which are of value to the established order. If only those methods can be mobilised without reference to the values and politics! Thus community and youth work is alternately subject to forces of incorporation and marginalisation by the state. Some of its most useful approaches and insights are persistently plundered for use in other contexts, its organisations re-aligned under the umbrella of more controlling and controlled agencies. Often this is accomplished via the medium of social work or formal education and training. However, other state sponsored services are increasingly exhorted to adopt a 'community' based approach. Hence the appellation 'Community' in front of so many interventions undertaken in localities, including those offered under the umbrella of health, housing and even business, without any necessary acknowledgment of the principles and values of community and youth work. Community and youth workers, insecure about the status of their own profession, without clear disciplinary boundaries for guidance, lacking a statutory basis



for the work and subject to the vagaries of funding fashions, are particularly vulnerable to incorporation by such services and to the subsequent destabilisation of the principles which inform their work.

The history of community and youth work has been frequently subsumed into other welfare and educational histories. In particular, those aspects of what was originally known as 'social work' but which were never fully adopted by that profession, except in the case of major youth movements, have been rendered invisible by their lack of a specific identity. Community work has been forced to negotiate the shifting sands between social work and youth work. Meanwhile, the history of youth work as a form of community work has been almost completely obliterated. With that obliteration went much of the history of work with girls and young women, as social work became identified with families, and youth work identified with the trouble created by urban male youth. Meanwhile, those who have practised community and youth work, absorbed as they always are in the necessities of the present and the demands of an activism intent upon creating better futures, have had little time to spend worrying about the significance of a general historical understanding for the stability and relevance of their profession. The situation has been compounded by their association with the most powerless groups whose own histories have been excluded and distorted in standard historical narratives.

### **BREAKING THE SILENCES**

The dominant voices of history tell the stories of those who have greater access to the means of articulating and disseminating their own partial view, which is then presented via academic conventions as scientific and universal (Chakrabarty, 1992). The work of recovery of hidden voices has involved challenging this supposed universalism and questioning its claims to objectivity. Socialist historians have sought to unearth the evidence which locates working class people as agents of their own lives and which demonstrates the importance of class relations as part of the movement of history (eg Davin, 1996; Samuel, 1981; 1994). By concentrating upon excavating the stories of women and their worlds, feminist historians have begun to demonstrate the significance of gender relations within the grand narrative (eg Rowbotham, 1977; Parker, 1988; Smart, 1992). Similar developments in black (eg Stuurman, 2000; Chamberlain, 1997) and lesbian and gay historical research (eg Plummer, 1995; Rowbotham and Weeks, 1977; Weeks, 1977) establish the importance of 'race' and sexualities as essential features of social relations which contribute to the shape of history. These approaches to historiography have great significance in the effort to develop the history of community and youth work. Not only do they help to give voice to those whose circumstances are relevant to community and youth work activity, but they also provide the framework for thinking differently about the local and the specific. In turn, the discovery of the history of community and youth work adds a timbre to these emerging voices.

Stories of neighbourhood and youth groups, of activists operating within narrow geographical boundaries, and responding to the peculiarities of local conditions might appear at first glance to be only of specialist interest. Certainly, the academy would wish to dismiss such stories as mere 'localism'. Yet when such local knowledge is

harnessed to universal concepts and to national or global movements, it begins to appear as a substantial and meaningful representation of the efforts of human beings to deal constructively and practically with the forces of change, to self-consciously and purposefully act upon the world in order to improve it and to creatively mobilise that which is altruistic within the human character to transcend the limitations of social convention and the narrowness of respectability. Ultimately, the local and particular stories which provide the stuff of community and youth work history are a testimony to the human desire to practice democratic and humanistic principles, and to pursue social justice in everyday life.

It is possible to discern the outlines of a distinctive community and youth work history emerging from a range of initiatives intended to give voice to the dispossessed. It is within such bodies as History Workshop, The Women's History Network, and The Voluntary Action History Society that opportunities have arisen for the discussion of relevant historical research. The historical conferences organised by the editorial group of *Youth and Policy* are an expression of the growing possibility of creating a distinctive field of community and youth work history which might make a contribution to the establishment of the discipline and the security of the profession. It is from the *Youth and Policy* conferences that this, the second edited collection of historical essays has emerged.

## ARCHITECTS OF CHANGE

The range of chapters in this book, like those of the previous collection, *Essays in the History of Community and Youth Work* (Gilchrist, Jeffs and Spence, 2001), is an expression of the enthusiasms and interests of authors who, in the main, have links and identify with community and youth work organisations and processes. The particular chapters are offered as contributions to what must be understood as a much wider project of delineating a general history of community and youth work. The people and organisations whose lives and activities are outlined in the following pages responded to difficulties and crises caused by social changes which were seldom benign in their impact. They were engaged in purposeful activity, devising methods of intervention which seemed appropriate to the situations they encountered, and guided by their own personal beliefs and philosophies. Mostly they were operating in uncharted territory. There were no blueprints or models for them to follow and the particularity of local conditions meant that where such models seemed to exist, they must of necessity be adapted to the local situation.

Each story told here refers to different conditions in which practitioners drew upon their own resources, experiences and creativity, created new organisations, adapted pre-existing organisations and made their interventions matter to others. Success was contingent upon the ability to meet social needs and to do so in a manner which was in sympathy with the aspirations and conditions of existence of those who were the object of attention. Some individuals gave their whole lives to their work, sacrificing wealth, health and even life itself in their efforts to work for the greater good. Others used community and youth work as a stepping stone in careers which reached fulfilment elsewhere. Yet others found in community and youth work the means of personal self-

expression or of effecting their own freedom from the social conventions which restricted their lives. Whatever their motivations and whatever the extent of their commitment, all of those who engaged in the work in the past experienced both success and failure in their ventures. Their successes are indicative of the extent to which their work understood local circumstances, adapted to changing conditions and mobilised universal human aspirations. Their failures suggest disjunctures between their own intentions, skills and motivations, the organisational or policy context within which they operated and the real needs of the people whose lives they intended to influence.

The architecture of community and youth work is a delicate balance of art and science. The art lies in the ability to read and interpret constantly changing local social conditions and forces, to work creatively with a range of cultural media and to seize the moment for constructive critical and informal education. The science is an underpinning of knowledge and information which lends stability, which provides the means whereby appropriate organisations can be created and sustained, funding can be accessed and functional concerns can be competently addressed. The most successful practitioners are those who are most capable of integrating the art and the science. To tend only towards the art holds the danger of producing superficial artistry which impresses in the short term but is ultimately unstable, lacking solid foundations. To concentrate on the science is to court the danger of reducing the work to a series of mechanistic responses to discrete problems and in so doing to lose the shape of the building. The work which is recorded here is offered as a contribution towards the creation of an architecture which defines a building in which both form and content are not only beautiful and appropriate to function and context, but which is efficient, sustainable and enduring.

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